Name _____ Date _____

Federalists and Anti-Federalists: The Debate over Ratification

Directions: Read the passage. Then answer each question.

The Debate over Ratification

The Great Debate over the Constitution

The Constitution was signed in September 1787, but it was only a plan. To become law, it had to be ratified, or approved, by nine of the thirteen states. Each state held a special meeting called a convention to vote on it. For the next year, Americans argued about it in newspapers, taverns and town halls. People who supported it called themselves Federalists. People who opposed it became known as Anti-Federalists.

Federalists argued that the Articles of Confederation had failed. Under the Articles, they pointed out, Congress could not collect taxes, control trade or put down revolts like Shays' Rebellion. The Constitution, they said, would fix these problems. They also argued that the new government would not grow too strong. Its power was split among three branches. Each branch could check the others, so none could take over. James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay explained these ideas in newspaper essays later known as *The Federalist*.

Anti-Federalists, such as Patrick Henry of Virginia, argued that the Constitution made the national government too strong. In their view, it would take power away from the states and the people. Some feared that a president in command of an army could become like a king. Others said one government could not serve such a large country. Its leaders in Congress would be too few and too far away to know what people needed. Above all, Anti-Federalists objected that the Constitution had no bill of rights. A bill of rights is a list of freedoms the government cannot take away, such as freedom of speech and freedom of religion.

Federalists answered that a bill of rights was not needed. The national government, they said, could use only the powers the Constitution listed. Still, to win votes, many of them promised to add a bill of rights once the new government began. That promise helped win close votes in several states. Massachusetts approved the Constitution 187 to 168, and New York approved it by just three votes.

Delaware had been the first state to ratify, in December 1787. New Hampshire's vote in June 1788 made it the ninth state to approve, so the plan could take effect. The new government began in 1789, with George Washington as president. Keeping the promise to add a bill of rights, Congress proposed changes, called amendments, that year. In 1791, the first ten amendments were added to the Constitution as the Bill of Rights.

1. Which two problems did Federalists say the Articles had?

☐ A. The government had too many branches.

☐ B. The president had too much power.

☐ C. Each state had too many members in Congress.

☐ D. Congress could not collect taxes.

☐ E. Congress could not put down revolts like Shays' Rebellion.

2. Which sentence from the passage best shows the Anti-Federalists' biggest complaint?

A. "Above all, Anti-Federalists objected that the Constitution had no bill of rights."

B. "For the next year, Americans argued about it in newspapers, taverns and town halls."

C. "The new government began in 1789, with George Washington as president."

D. "People who opposed it became known as Anti-Federalists."

3. Match each argument to the reason the passage gives for it.

Write the letter of the matching answer on each line.

1. _____ Federalists said no one branch could take over
2. _____ Federalists said a bill of rights was not needed
3. _____ Some Anti-Federalists feared a strong president
4. _____ Some Anti-Federalists said one government could not serve so large a country

Choices for question 3

A. A president in command of an army could become like a king

B. The government could use only the powers the Constitution listed

C. The states had already voted to keep the Articles

D. Its leaders in Congress would be too few and too far away to know what people needed

E. Each branch could check the others

4. Choose the word from the word bank that completes each sentence.

Word bank
ratify • amendment • repeal • boycott • convention

To _____ the Constitution meant to approve it. Each state held a special meeting called a _____ to vote on it.

5. Which sentence from the passage best shows that some states were deeply split?

A. "Each branch could check the others, so none could take over."

B. "Federalists answered that a bill of rights was not needed."

C. "Massachusetts approved the Constitution 187 to 168, and New York approved it by just three votes."

D. "The Constitution, they said, would fix these problems."

6. Why did many Federalists promise to add a bill of rights?

A. To win votes in the state conventions

B. To give the president more power

C. To keep the Articles in place

D. Because they had decided the plan was a mistake

7. Use the dates in the passage to put these events in order. Match each event to First, Second or Third.

Write the letter of the matching answer on each line.

1. _____ The new government begins, with Washington as president
2. _____ Delaware ratifies the Constitution
3. _____ New Hampshire's vote lets the Constitution take effect

A. Second

B. First

C. Third

8. Which sentence from the passage best shows that Anti-Federalists feared for the power of the states?

A. "In their view, it would take power away from the states and the people."

B. "Each state held a special meeting called a convention to vote on it."

C. "Delaware had been the first state to ratify, in December 1787."

D. "That promise helped win close votes in several states."

9. How did Madison, Hamilton and Jay try to win support for the plan?

A. They wrote newspaper essays explaining its ideas.

B. They asked Britain to approve the plan.

C. They gave speeches in the British Parliament.

D. They wrote a bill of rights before any state voted.

10. How did the debate end, according to the passage?

A. The Anti-Federalists agreed that no bill of rights was needed.

B. Congress took away the president's command of the army.

C. The Constitution was ratified, and a bill of rights was later added to it.

D. The states rejected the plan and kept the Articles.